

SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM



VISTA MEMBER HANDBOOK 2011-2012

Saint Paul VISTA Program / 390 City Hall / 15 West Kellogg Boulevard / Saint Paul, MN 55102

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PROGRAM STAFF & TERMINOLOGY

Mailing Address:

Saint Paul VISTA Program
Mayor's Office
390 City Hall
15 West Kellogg Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Program Staff:

William Tully
VISTA Program Manager
Phone: 651.266.8582
Fax: 651.266.8521
E-mail: william.tully@ci.stpaul.mn.us

TERMINOLOGY:

Sponsoring Organization: City of Saint Paul, Saint Paul VISTA Program and staff.

Participating Site: Site where VISTA member performs service. May be referred to as the "service site" or "partner site".

VISTA Supervisor: The person who provides daily supervision and guidance for the VISTA member at his or her assigned service site. May be referred to as the "on-site supervisor".

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS): An independent federal agency created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. CNCS provides federal funds to implement AmeriCorps VISTA and other national service programs. Each state has a state office which houses program officers who oversee program implementation and progress monitoring. May be referred to as "VISTA State Office" or "State Office".

The program officer assigned to the Saint Paul VISTA Program is:

Jaime Renner, State Program Specialist
Corporation for National and Community Service
431 South Seventh Street, Room 2405
Minneapolis, MN 55415
Phone: 612.334.4085
Fax: 612.334.4084
jrenner@cns.gov

AMERICORPS VISTA

Helping Others Help Themselves

AmeriCorps VISTA helps individuals and communities implement grassroots solutions designed to alleviate poverty. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965, the program places individuals at nonprofit, faith-based and other community organizations, and public agencies to create and expand programs that fight illiteracy, improve health services, reduce unemployment, increase housing opportunities, reduce recidivism, and expand access to technology for those living in poverty across America. VISTA members ultimately bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. Through AmeriCorps VISTA, ordinary people provide extraordinary service in more than 1,500 projects nationwide.

AmeriCorps VISTA members leverage human, financial, and material resources to increase the capacity of low-income communities across the country to solve their own problems. When VISTA members complete their service, they leave behind lasting solutions to some of our country's toughest problems.

Since 1965, more than 177,000 individuals have served through VISTA. Today, over 6,000 AmeriCorps VISTA members serve throughout the country—recruiting and supporting over 500,000 community volunteers, raising over \$100 million of cash resources and over \$50 million of in-kind resources, mentoring over 6,000 children of prisoners, and helping place 6,500 people in jobs.



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Mayor Chris Coleman holds education as a top priority for his Administration. He believes that cities have a critical role in the development of young people and that the city's future economic stability and quality of life depend on our ability to connect young people to meaningful learning experiences. Mayor Coleman leads with a vision for how children should be prepared for school and for life by working in collaboration with the community to leverage city and community resources, building on the strengths of Saint Paul residents to create long lasting results. The Saint Paul VISTA Program is a key initiative in his Administration's work to close the opportunity gap facing children, youth and families in Saint Paul.

The Saint Paul VISTA Program gives individuals from different backgrounds the chance to come together to make real differences in their community while gaining valuable work skills. Saint Paul VISTA Program members leverage human, financial and material resources to increase the capacity of communities across Saint Paul to address issues of poverty. VISTA members contribute to these goals by building capacity at their host organizations. Capacity building is undertaken through indirect service projects in non-profit agencies, schools, and government entities across the city. Throughout their year of service, VISTA members work to ensure that Saint Paul youth have access to high quality learning opportunities. Members focus on projects in four core program areas:

1. Expanding early childhood education and literacy programs so that all children enter school ready to learn.
2. Enhancing formal and informal learning opportunities for Saint Paul students, including before, during and after school.
3. Informing and preparing students for post-secondary educational and professional opportunities.
4. Engaging parents, families and the community to support learning and youth success.

2010-2011 Outcomes

During the 2010-2011 program year, Saint Paul VISTA Program members and projects delivered the following outcomes:

- Recruited and supported over 6,500 community volunteers who provided over 71,000 hours of support to young people through VISTA host sites.
- Coordinated and developed programs that prepared over 2,900 students for postsecondary educational opportunities and the workforce.
- Generated more than \$169,000 for their host organizations in the form of grants and cash donations.
- Generated over \$35,000 in in-kind donations for their host organizations.

VISTA MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

VISTA Member Role

VISTA members leverage human, financial and material resources to increase the capacity of communities across the United States to address issues of poverty and ultimately close the achievement and opportunity gaps facing young people and families.

VISTA Service Requirements

- Attend CNCS-sponsored Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) as set forth by the Corporation for National and Community Service
- Attend Saint Paul VISTA Program Orientation and on-site orientation as provided by partner site
- Commit to one year of full-time (approximately 40 hours per week), full immersion national service (additional employment prohibited)
- Abide by VISTA, Saint Paul VISTA Program and service site organization policies and procedures
- Attend meetings and trainings as scheduled by CNCS, the Saint Paul VISTA Program and service site
- Perform indirect service as set forth in the VISTA Project Plan and assignment description
- Communicate with sponsoring organization and participating site staff to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of the community
- Participate in regular meetings with on-site supervisor
- Maintain records and collect data for program evaluation
- Submit quarterly reports as well as a year-end report to the Saint Paul VISTA Program
- Notify VISTA Supervisor and Saint Paul VISTA Program staff of personal and sick leave

Activities or tasks required by the Saint Paul VISTA Program, such as team meetings and trainings, supersede activities and events taking place at the VISTA's service site, unless the VISTA receives prior approval from Saint Paul VISTA Program staff.

Commitment & Benefits

VISTA members commit to one year of service, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Typically, VISTA members serve between 35 and 45 hours per week.

During a VISTA member's service year, he or she is eligible for the following benefits:

- Up to \$550 in relocation expense reimbursement, if eligible
- Annual living allowance of \$11,232; paid in bi-weekly direct deposits of \$432.00
- Health benefits for VISTA member
- Federal student loan forbearance and interest accrual payment
- Mileage reimbursement for service-related travel activities made on behalf of the site as well as on behalf of the Saint Paul VISTA Program
- Trainings and \$75 professional development allowance
- Choice of \$5,550 education award or \$1,500 cash stipend, upon successful completion of service year
- Maximum of \$400 per month per child in child care reimbursement, if eligible
- 10 days of personal leave, 10 days of sick leave, and holidays observed by participating site, as well as 5 days of emergency leave if applicable
- Life insurance, optional

Qualifications

- Commitment to the AmeriCorps VISTA mission and the Saint Paul VISTA Program
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent job or volunteer experience
- Strong organizational, computer and interpersonal skills
- U.S. citizen, National or Permanent Legal Resident
- Background screening

Limitations & Prohibited Activities

VISTA members are not employees of the City of Saint Paul or their assigned service site. Members should not displace paid staff nor should they perform such duties as photocopying, filing, running errands, or other clerical duties unless pertinent to their immediate role as a Saint Paul VISTA Program member.

Members should not spend a significant portion of their time providing direct services to individual clients or community members.

VISTA members may not participate in labor organizing, lobbying, religious or political activities while performing as a VISTA member.

VISTA members may not have additional employment during their VISTA service term. Additionally, VISTA members must receive permission from the Saint Paul VISTA Program before enrolling in classes, whether full- or part-time, at an educational institution.

Outside employment and/or enrollment in courses without the necessary prior approval is cause for termination.

For further clarification or to receive a full list of prohibited activities, please see your VISTA Member Handbook or contact Saint Paul VISTA Program staff.

SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM

STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Saint Paul VISTA Program staff work to ensure that VISTA members experience success during their service year and that the VISTA projects at their service sites are supported so they have a positive impact on the community.

The Saint Paul VISTA Program provides the following to participating sites:

- Support and technical assistance to participating sites in the development of the VISTA Project Plan and VISTA member assignment description;
- Extensive training for VISTA members;
- Saint Paul VISTA Program Supervisor Orientation and meetings;
- Support and assistance to the participating site regarding member recruitment, interview, selection and approval – *final approval required from the VISTA State Office*;
- Support to on-site supervisors in administrative matters concerning project assignment, transportation, etc. Saint Paul VISTA Program staff will be available to respond to support requests for any program-related issues;
- Supervision and tracking of the progress of participating sites;
- Support and tracking of member benefits and sick/vacation time;
- Site visits and ongoing support as needed;
- Fiscal management of federal grant; and
- Reporting as mandated by the Saint Paul VISTA Program's federal grant.

The Saint Paul VISTA Program provides the following to VISTA members:

- Saint Paul VISTA Orientation and other in-service VISTA trainings, and a commitment to the personal and professional development of individual members and the cohort as a whole;
- Support and supervision to VISTA members in administrative matters concerning project assignment, transportation, etc.;
- Support regarding any program-related issues;
- Supervision and tracking of VISTA project progress;
- Tracking of VISTA member leave;
- \$75 professional development allowance;
- Payroll and other reimbursements; and
- Site visits and ongoing support as needed.

VISTA SUPERVISOR AND SERVICE SITE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Participating sites are responsible for the following:

- Develop 3-year VISTA Project Plan and performance measures, with support from Saint Paul VISTA Program staff;
- Supervisor trainings, when applicable;
- Work with the Saint Paul VISTA Program to recruit, interview, and select members. Final approval from CNCS is required for all VISTA positions;
- Provide on-site orientation for the VISTA member within two weeks of the VISTA's start date;
- Provide work space, phone, mailbox, computer, Internet access, e-mail account, site ID badge, and other materials necessary for the VISTA's work, comparable to that of paid staff;
- Provide regular supervision and support – may include weekly meetings, regular review of VISTA Project Plan, etc. The support a VISTA member receives from her supervisor is a key factor in her success as a VISTA and in the success of the VISTA project.
- Provide background checks for community volunteers, if applicable. If the participating site requires background checks on community volunteers, the site is responsible for completing the necessary background checks on community volunteers recruited by the VISTA member.
- Complete VISTA evaluations twice a year;
- Provide project progress monitoring;
- Work with VISTA and organization to ensure efforts are sustained beyond VISTA partnership;
- Reimburse VISTA members for service-related mileage incurred on behalf of the site and/or project.
- Complete quarterly reports and an end-of-year report with VISTA member, to be submitted to Saint Paul VISTA Program staff. The reports require the participating site to identify the in-kind resources dedicated to the VISTA project, such as space, supervision time, equipment, supplies, phone and Internet access;
- Ensure VISTA member duties do not displace staff duties, are limited to indirect service, and are not political or religious in nature; and
- Submit cost share fee payment in accordance with the agreement between the service site and the Saint Paul VISTA Program.

MY AMERICORPS

My AmeriCorps, <https://my.americorps.gov>, provides a one-stop-shop for AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA and NCCC members and alumni - presenting a wealth of information and frequently requested forms and services, including access to the former AmeriCorps Online Payment System features. Examples of features available include the ability for members and alumni to:

- Modify contact information (name, addresses, e-mail address)
- View and print tax statements and forms (as applicable)
- View and print pay statements (as applicable)
- Access customized letters certifying VISTA term of service with an AmeriCorps program

How is My AmeriCorps different from the AmeriCorps website?

While the AmeriCorps website provides information to the general public, My AmeriCorps is a space just for those who serve or have served. My AmeriCorps provides interactive tools and customized information for every point in the AmeriCorps experience.

If I've elected to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, what can My AmeriCorps do for me?
By logging into My AmeriCorps and clicking on "My Education Award," members and alumni can use My AmeriCorps to:

- Update your contact information
- Access, create, and submit forms to:
 - Have your student loans deferred during your term of service (Forbearance Request)
 - Request payment of the interest that accrued on your student loans during your term of service (Interest Accrual Benefit Request)
 - Request payment of qualified student loans (Education Award Payment Request)
 - Request payment of current Educational Expenses (Education Award Payment Request)
 - Extend the date of expiration of your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (Award Extension Request)
- View the status of your pending requests
- Check your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award balance
- View your account history

VISTA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The following VISTA Policies and Procedures are intended for informational purposes only. For complete VISTA Policies and Procedures, refer to the “AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook” and “AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisor’s Manual.”

MEMBER LEAVE

VISTA members receive leave during their service year as well as holidays observed by the service site or host organization.

Sick Leave

VISTA members receive 10 days of sick leave. Members must notify on-site supervisors as well as the Saint Paul VISTA Program Manager if they are going to be absent from work for an illness.

Personal Leave

VISTA members receive 10 days of personal leave. Members must obtain prior approval for personal leave. Requests must be approved by the on-site supervisor and the Saint Paul VISTA Program Manager.

Emergency Leave

The Saint Paul VISTA Program and CNCS may grant VISTA members up to one week (5 days) of emergency leave if an immediate family member (spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandparent, or guardian) becomes critically ill or dies. Any additional time away from the project requires the approval of the CNCS State Program Director. Emergency leave does not count against the member’s personal leave time.

If circumstances require the member to take emergency leave, the member should notify the on-site supervisor and the Saint Paul VISTA Program Manager at once, and if requested, provide evidence of the emergency. On-site supervisors are expected to work with Saint Paul VISTA Program staff to ensure the correct process for these circumstances.

Leave Policies

Under AmeriCorps VISTA provisions, leave is normally not granted during the first three months or during the last month of service.

During leave, all regular member benefits continue. CNCS pays no travel expenses for leave. VISTA members enjoy whatever national holidays are recognized by their service site; however, they do not receive federal holidays that are not recognized by their service site.

If the service site provides its staff additional “floating holidays,” “spring breaks,” “summer recesses,” etc., members are expected to continue their service unless authorized to take the time off as part of their VISTA leave.

The Saint Paul VISTA Program Manager must be notified of all usage of sick and personal time.

SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES

Saint Paul VISTA Program members with accounts on social networking web sites must abide by the following guidelines during their year of service:

Representing VISTA

The role of a Saint Paul VISTA Program member is three-fold – a VISTA represents AmeriCorps VISTA, the service site, and the Saint Paul Mayor's Office. It is important to always be mindful of what VISTA represents and how postings may be viewed by others in the community and on social networks. Postings that might jeopardize the character of these entities in any way must be strictly avoided.

Professionalism

Most social networking websites are not fully private. As such, only post photos or comments that would be appropriate for professional colleagues or prospective employers to view.

Posting Photographs

Sharing photos on social networking sites can be a great way to share memories of the VISTA year. However, posted photos should not include individuals who: a) do not wish to be posted on the site; or b) are under the age of 18 and do not have permission to be posted on the site, such as children or students from a VISTA service site.

CONTINUATION OF SERVICE

It is at the discretion of the Saint Paul VISTA Program and the Corporation for National and Community Service to afford the opportunity of VISTA service beyond the initial year of enrollment.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

Discriminatory Behavior

Discriminatory behavior includes inappropriate remarks about or conduct related to an employee's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, disability, sex, marital status, age, sexual orientation, status with regard to public assistance, or any other protected class. Violent behavior includes the use of physical force, harassment, intimidation, or abuse of power or authority when the impact is used to control by causing pain, fear or hurt. Violent behavior also includes verbal abuse and/or acts, words, comments, or conditions that would lead a person to reasonably believe a violent act could occur. Harassment includes words or conduct that is severe or pervasive, and that a reasonable person would find abusive. Behavior prohibited by this policy also includes requests to engage in illegal, immoral or unethical conduct, or retaliation for making a complaint under this policy. *(All behaviors prohibited by this policy have not been explicitly covered herein. The definitions used are for illustrative purposes and are not meant to be all inclusive.)*

Sexual Harassment

One specific kind of discriminatory and offensive behavior is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, which can consist of a wide range of unwanted and unwelcome sexually-directed behavior, is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. Submitting to the conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or of obtaining public services;
2. Submitting to or rejecting the conduct is used as the basis for an employment decision affecting an individual's employment or the delivery of public services; or
3. Such conduct has the purpose or result of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or public service environment.

Behavior prohibited by this policy can include unwelcome sexual remarks or compliments, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo or propositions, sexually-suggestive facial expressions, kissing, touching, and sexual contact.

Any person who feels he or she is being subjected to discriminatory, violent, or offensive behavior of any kind may feel free to object to the behavior and shall report the behavior to their supervisor. In the case of violent behavior, the incident needs to be reported immediately after the incident.

Additional Employment and Educational Enrollment

Because AmeriCorps VISTA is a full immersion experience requiring its members to be able to attend community meetings and dedicate themselves to understanding and serving the community to which they are assigned, VISTA members may not have additional employment during their VISTA service term. Additionally, VISTA members must receive permission from the Saint Paul VISTA Program before enrolling in classes, whether full- or part-time, at an educational institution.

Outside employment and/or enrollment in courses without the necessary prior approval is cause for termination.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE POLICY

Drug-related Offenses on AmeriCorps VISTA / Saint Paul VISTA Program Property: Pursuant to the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988, VISTAs are prohibited from unlawfully manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, possessing or using a controlled substance in the workplace. As further required under the Drug-Free Workplace Act, a VISTA, as a condition of employment, must notify Saint Paul VISTA Program staff if she or he is convicted of any criminal drug statute violation no later than five days after the conviction.

Alcoholic Beverages on AmeriCorps VISTA Property: Consumption of alcoholic beverages on Saint Paul VISTA Program or VISTA Program participating site property is prohibited except at Saint Paul VISTA Program and participating site-sponsored social events.

Drug and Alcohol Use Off AmeriCorps VISTA / Saint Paul VISTA Program Property: Unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance, and excessive use of alcohol, that may adversely affect a VISTA's job performance, or that may reflect unfavorably upon public or governmental confidence in the manner in which the Saint Paul VISTA Program carries out its activities, is prohibited.

Disciplinary Action: Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination as outlined by CNCS provisions.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If a circumstance arises during your service that directly affects your service situation or that you believe violates regulations governing the terms and conditions of service, resulting in a denial or infringement of a right or benefit to you, you may file a grievance. Saint Paul VISTA Program members follow the member grievance procedure referenced in your VISTA Member Handbook and reprinted in full in the Member Handbook Appendix.

GROUND FOR MEMBER TERMINATION

CNCS may terminate or suspend a VISTA member based on conduct (for cause or termination) for the following reasons:

- Conviction of a criminal offense under federal, state, or local statute or ordinance;

- Violation of any provision of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended, or a Corporation regulation, policy, or guideline;
- Failure, refusal, or inability to perform prescribed project duties as outlined in the project application and/or assignment description and as directed by the Sponsoring Organization to which you are assigned;
- Involvement in activities that substantially interfere with your performance of project duties;
- Intentional false statement, omission, fraud, or deception in obtaining selection as a member;
- Any conduct on your part that substantially diminishes your effectiveness as an AmeriCorps VISTA member, including skipping mandatory training sessions sponsored by the Saint Paul VISTA Program or at state, cluster or national training events; or
- Unsatisfactory performance of assignment.